

Long time coming but finally here:

I was a skinny country boy who had never been out of my small Kentucky town before I went into the Navy. When I first tried to enlist I didn't weight enough. Went back home and ate every banana I could find and tried again. Made it that time. I was just barely 21 that Sunday morning when the Oklahoma went down. To the best of my recollection this was my morning aboard the USS Oklahoma on the day Pearl was bombed.

Our guns had been torn down and not put back together yet. I don't recall any officers being aboard. A lot of the guys had been out the night before and were sleeping with the torpedoes hit. Some never woke up.

The announcement over the loud speaker was, "the Japs are attacking, this is no shit."

I was dressed only in my skivvies when the ship started to roll but my clothes were the least things on my mind. Getting out of that metal coffin was all I could think of. Everything was wrong side up. Our only way out was through a porthole. The floors were slippery from oil and everyone was falling around me. Trying desperately to find something, anything, to hold on to. When we finally got to the porthole, the guy in front of me got stuck. We were pushing him from the bottom and they were pulling him from the top. I was just a kid and scared that I was going to die right there.

When he finally was freed, someone helped me out. The water was covered with oil and fire was everywhere. It was like a nightmare. Chaos. Everyone doing what they could to stop fires, defend themselves, and save their lives. Shipmates screaming, yelling, and dying. I couldn't really swim but I jumped into the water anyway. The next thing I can remember was another sailor pulling me ashore....and the grand Lady was down. I had lost everything I had but my life was spared. I had lived through a hell more terrifying than I had never envisioned. It has only been in the last 5 or 6 years that I have been able to share any of my memories with my family.

Even though over 60 years has passed and I am now over 81 years old, I can still see and hear many ghosts of that morning. They never truly leave.

Emil (Slim) W. Kegley